



## SUMMARY REPORT

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**Agenda Date:** 7/8/2025

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**To:** Board of Directors of the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District  
**Department or Agency Name(s):** Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District  
**Staff Name and Phone Number:** Misti Arias, 565-7364; Allison Schichtel, (707) 565-7353  
**Vote Requirement:** Majority  
**Supervisory District(s):** Countywide

**Title:**

Amendments to Priority Conservation Areas Adopted by the Association of Bay Area Governments

**Recommended Action:**

Adopt a resolution :

- A. Endorsing amendments to the Coastal Forestlands, Mayacamas South (Sonoma County), and Green Valley-Atascadero Creek Watershed Priority Conservation Areas to be adopted by the Association of Bay Area Governments; and
- B. Authorizing the General Manager to complete and submit the required Priority Conservation Area amendment form and any supporting materials to the Association of Bay Area Governments

**Executive Summary:**

Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (Ag + Open Space) staff is requesting Board adoption of a resolution endorsing amendments to three existing Priority Conservation Areas (PCAs) in Sonoma County. PCAs are locally nominated geographic areas adopted by the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) identified to support the Bay Area's regional conservation, resilience, and sustainability objectives.

Projects within nominated PCAs may be eligible for funding through the PCA Grant Program which provides funding for acquisition, restoration, and public access improvements. In conformance with new mapping eligibility criteria established by ABAG and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission in spring 2024, Ag + Open Space is proposing to expand the following three PCAs in support of the organization's and its partners' conservation goals: Coastal Forestlands, Mayacamas South (Sonoma County), and Green Valley-Atascadero Creek Watershed.

**Discussion:**

In 2007, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) and the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) developed a regional land use planning framework based upon Priority Development Areas and Priority Conservation Areas (PCAs). PCAs are locations nominated by local jurisdictions, open space districts, or parks districts and designated by ABAG to encourage the protection of natural habitats and the preservation of open space for future generations in the Bay Area. MTC and ABAG updated the PCA program in spring 2024 to ensure improved alignment with regional planning and funding opportunities.

The PCA nomination process is locally driven, allowing jurisdictions to identify and propose areas of regional

significance based on local priorities and community input. Projects within nominated PCAs may be eligible for funding through the MTC's PCA Grant Program, funded through the One Bay Area Grant program. This initiative allocates Federal Highway Administration resources to agencies, tribes, and non-profits to support programs that enhance safety, stimulate economic development, and help the region achieve climate and air quality goals, which can include acquisition, restoration, and public access improvements. MTC anticipates releasing a PCA Grant Program cycle in 2025 for \$8 million.

PCAs are voluntary designations, and as such, do not take precedence over local control. Under Government Code 65080 (b)(2)(K), a sustainable communities strategy (Plan Bay Area) does not supersede a city's land use authority.

PCAs are characterized as one or more types:

- Natural Lands
- Agricultural & Working Lands
- Urban Greening
- Recreation
- Climate Adaptation (must overlap with one other PCA type)

### **Existing PCAs**

The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (Ag + Open Space) is the lead agency for the following PCAs (with PCA type(s) in parentheses):

- Coastal Agriculture (Agricultural & Working Lands)
- Coastal Forestlands (formerly Coastal Sonoma to Armstrong Redwoods) (Natural Lands; Agricultural & Working Lands)
- Green Valley-Atascadero Creek Watershed (formerly Pitkin Marsh-Atascadero Watershed) (Agricultural & Working Lands)
- Laguna de Santa Rosa (Natural Lands)
- Mayacamas North (Sonoma County (formerly Northern Mayacamas) (Natural Lands; Agricultural & Working Lands)
- Mayacamas South (Sonoma County) (formerly Upper Mark West Watershed) (Natural Lands)
- Santa Rosa Plain (Natural Lands)
- Sonoma Baylands (Natural Lands; Climate Adaptation)
- Sonoma Coast (formerly Coastal Access & Resource Protection) (Natural Lands)
- Sonoma Mountain (Natural Lands; Agricultural & Working Lands)
- The Cedars (Natural Lands)

### **Proposed Amendments**

In early 2025, ABAG and MTC initiated a new PCA nomination cycle and worked with lead agencies to amend existing PCAs to align with the updated PCA planning framework. Ag + Open Space made minor modifications to several PCAs based on new eligibility requirements and is also proposing more significant amendments to existing PCAs (detailed below). The proposed amendments align with the community-driven goals and conservation strategies outlined in Ag + Open Space's long-term comprehensive plan, the Vital Lands Initiative. Ag + Open Space additionally engaged with and incorporated input on amendment areas from conservation partners, including Sonoma Land Trust, Sonoma County Regional Parks, Gold Ridge Resource Conservation

District (RCD), Sonoma RCD, and the Regional Climate Protection Authority. Although Ag + Open Space is not nominating new PCAs, amendments to certain PCAs are significant enough to warrant a resolution from our Board of Directors endorsing the changes. Attachment A includes a detailed map showing existing PCAs in relation to proposed amended PCAs.

### **Coastal Forestlands PCA Amendment**

- **Amendment Areas:** Ag + Open Space is proposing to rename and expand the former Coastal Sonoma to Armstrong Redwoods PCA to include those portions of the Gualala River, Dutch Bill Creek, and Salmon Creek watersheds that were not included in original PCA, as well as the following subwatersheds within the Dry Creek watershed: Mill Creek, Pena Creek, Warm Springs Creek, Galloway Creek, and Lake Sonoma-Dry Creek. Additionally, staff is proposing to include open space lands surrounding the eastern edge of the City of Cloverdale.
- **Area:** 169,992 acres (original); 306,320 acres (proposed amended)
- **Conservation and Community Goals:** Important conservation features in the amended PCA include Coast redwood, Douglas-fir, and mixed hardwood forests; stands of remnant old growth and populations of rare serpentine plants; wildlife corridors and large intact habitat areas; headwater contributing areas for salmonid-bearing streams; and climate resilient sites that are expected to support a diverse array of plants and animals into the future. The amended PCA includes 106,000 acres of protected lands that may be eligible for restoration and public access improvement grants through the PCA Grant Program, including Jenner Headlands Preserve, Armstrong Redwoods State Natural Reserve, Austin Creek State Recreation Area, and Buckeye Forest. Ag + Open Space and its partners are actively pursuing conservation and land stewardship projects within this region to further goals to protect and enhance terrestrial and aquatic habitat, enhance streamflow and water quality for native Coho salmon and steelhead trout, ensure landscape connectivity, reduce wildfire risk, and promote public access.

### **Mayacamas South (Sonoma County)**

- **Amendment Areas:** Ag + Open Space is proposing to rename and expand the former Upper Mark West Creek Watershed PCA to include open space lands within the Upper Mark West Creek Watershed and lands south along the Mayacamas Range to the Sonoma Developmental Center.
- **Area:** 19,577 acres (original); 45,794 acres (proposed amended)
- **Conservation and Community Goals:** Important conservation features in the amended PCA include a mosaic of mixed hardwood woodlands, chaparral, and conifer forests that provide important habitat and migration corridors for wildlife; populations of rare serpentine plants and other sensitive plant species; in-stream and riparian habitat that supports Coho salmon, chinook salmon, steelhead trout, red-legged frog and other sensitive species; opportunities for recreational experiences across a diverse and scenic landscape; and opportunities to reduce wildfire risk in the wildland-urban interface. The amended PCA includes 21,000 acres of protected lands that may be eligible for restoration and improvement grants through the PCA Grant Program, including Sugarloaf State Park, Hood Mountain Regional Park & Open Space Preserve, Calabazas Creek Open Space Preserve, Sonoma Valley Regional Park, and properties owned by conservation non-profits (including Sonoma Land Trust and Audubon Canyon Ranch). Building on a network of existing protected lands, Ag + Open Space and its partners are actively pursuing conservation and land stewardship projects within this region to further goals to protect and enhance terrestrial and aquatic habitat, ensure landscape connectivity, enhance streamflow and water quality, protect scenic views, facilitate public access and recreation, and reduce wildfire risk.

### Green Valley-Atascadero Creek Watershed

- Amendment Areas: Ag + Open Space is proposing to rename and expand the former Pitkin Marsh-Atascadero Watershed PCA to include the entire Green Valley-Atascadero Creek Watershed.
- Area: 2,342 acres (original); 23,263 acres (proposed amended)
- Conservation and Community Goals: Important conservation features in the amended PCA include floodplain wetlands and aquatic and riparian habitats associated with Green Valley and Atascadero Creeks; in-stream habitat for Coho salmon, chinook salmon, and steelhead trout; and a concentration of diverse and agriculturally productive lands. Ag + Open Space and its partners are actively pursuing conservation and land stewardship projects within this region to further goals to protect lands that support diverse agriculture, protect and enhance lands that provide critical terrestrial and aquatic habitat for native plants and animals, and enhance streamflow and water quality for native Coho salmon, chinook salmon, and steelhead trout.

### Mapping and Boundary Details

The proposed PCAs satisfy the MTC/ABAG eligibility map requirements which ensure consistency in PCA nominations across the region. The proposed PCA boundaries have been carefully mapped to meet eligibility and avoid overlap with ineligible areas.

### Strategic Plan:

This item directly supports the County's Five-year Strategic Plan and is aligned with the following pillar, goal, and objective.

- Pillar: Climate Action and Resiliency
- Goal: 5. Maximize opportunities for mitigation of climate change and adaptation through land conservation work and land use policies.
- Objective: 2. Develop policies to maximize carbon sequestration and minimize loss of natural carbon sinks including old growth forests, the Laguna de Santa Rosa, and rangelands. Encourage agricultural and open space land management to maximize sequestration. Develop a framework and policies to incentivize collaboration with private and public landowners.

Amended PCAs include areas of the county with high existing carbon stocks, and inclusion of these areas may allow Ag + Open Space and its partners to apply for grant funding through the PCA Grant Program to implement conservation and stewardship projects focused on increasing carbon sequestration and landscape resilience.

### Racial Equity:

N/A

Was this item identified as an opportunity to apply the Racial Equity Toolkit?

No

### Prior Board Actions:

N/A

### FISCAL SUMMARY

#### Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

There are no anticipated fiscal or budgetary impacts resulting from the PCA amendment request. Continued

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designation allows Ag + Open Space to apply for funding opportunities in the future.

**Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):**

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**Attachments:**

Attachment A: Map of Existing PCAs and Proposed PCA Amendments  
Resolution

**Related Items "On File" with the Clerk of the Board:**

N/A